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BOOK II.

"The hour arrived—years having rolled away
When his return the Gods no more delay.
Lo! Ithaca the Fates award; and there
New trials meet the Wanderer."
HOMER: *Od.* lib. i, 16.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is continual spring and harvest here—
Continual, both meeting at one time;
For both the boughs do laughing blossoms bear,
And with fresh colours deck the wanton prime;
And eke at once the heavy trees they climb,
Which seem to labour under their fruit's load.

SPENSER: *The Garden of Adonis*.

Vis boni
In ipsa inesset forma.*—TERENCE.

* "Even in beauty there exists the power of virtue."

BEAUTY, thou art twice blessed; thou blessest the gazer and the possessor; often at once the effect and the cause of goodness! A sweet disposition, a lovely soul, an affectionate nature, will speak in the eyes, the lips, the brow, and become the cause of beauty. On the other hand, they who have a gift that commands love, a key that opens all hearts, are ordinarily inclined to look with happy eyes upon the world,—to be cheerful and serene, to hope and to confide. There is more wisdom than the vulgar dream of in our admiration of a fair face.

Evelyn Cameron was beautiful,—a beauty that came from the heart, and went to the heart; a beauty, the very spirit of which was love! Love smiled on her dimpled lips, it reposed on her open brow, it played in the profuse and careless ringlets of darkest yet sunniest auburn, which a breeze could lift from her delicate and virgin cheek; Love, in all its tenderness, in all its kindness, its unsuspecting truth, —Love coloured every thought, murmured in her low melodious voice, in all its symmetry and glorious womanhood. Love swelled the swan-like neck, and moulded the rounded limb.

She was just the kind of person that takes the judgment by storm: whether gay or grave, there was so charming and irresistible a grace about her. She seemed born, not only to captivate the giddy, but to turn the heads of the sage. Roxalana was nothing to her. How, in the obscure hamlet of Brook-Green, she had learned all the arts of pleasing it is impossible to say. In her arch smile, the pretty toss of her head, the half shyness, half freedom, of her winning ways, it was as if Nature had made her to delight one heart, and torment all others.

Without being learned, the mind of Evelyn was cultivated and well informed. Her heart, perhaps, helped to instruct her understanding; for by a kind of intuition she could appreciate all that was beautiful and elevated. Her unvitiated and guileless taste had a logic of its own: no schoolman had ever a quicker penetration into truth, no critic ever more readily detected the meretricious and the false. The book that Evelyn could admire was sure to be stamped with the impress of the noble, the lovely, or the true!

But Evelyn had faults,—the faults of her age; or, rather, she had tendencies that might conduce to error. She was of so generous a nature that the very thought of sacrificing her self for another had a charm. She ever acted from impulse,—impulses pure and good, but often rash and imprudent. She was yielding to weakness, persuaded into anything, so sensitive, that even a cold look from one moderately liked cut her to the heart; and by the sympathy that accompanies sensitiveness, no pain to her was so great as the thought of giving pain to another. Hence it was that Vargrave might form reasonable hopes of his ultimate success. It was a dangerous constitution for happiness! How many chances must combine to preserve to the mid-day of characters like this the sunshine of their dawn! The butterfly that seems the child of the summer and the flowers—what wind will not chill its mirth, what touch will not brush away its hues?

CHAPTER II.

THESE, on a general survey, are the modes
Of pulpit oratory which agree
With no unlettered audience.—POLWHELE.

MRS. LESLIE had returned from her visit to the rectory to her own home, and Evelyn had now been some weeks at Mrs. Merton's. As was natural, she had grown in some measure reconciled and resigned to her change of abode. In fact, no sooner did she pass Mrs. Merton's threshold, than, for the first time, she was made aware of her consequence in life.

The Rev. Mr. Merton was a man of the nicest perception in all things appertaining to worldly consideration. The second son of a very wealthy baronet (who was the first commoner of his county) and of the daughter of a rich and highly-descended peer, Mr. Merton had been brought near enough to rank and power to appreciate all their advantages. In early life he had been something of a "tuft-hunter;" but as his understanding was good and his passions not very strong, he had soon perceived that that vessel of clay, a young man with a moderate fortune, cannot long sail down the same stream with the metal vessels of rich earls and extravagant dandies. Besides, he was destined for the Church—because there was one of the finest livings in England in the family. He therefore took orders at six and twenty; married Mrs. Leslie's daughter, who had thirty thousand pounds: and settled at the rectory of Merton, within a mile of the family seat. He became a very respectable and extremely popular man. He was singularly hospitable, and built a new wing—containing a large dining-room and six capital bed-rooms—to the rectory, which had now much more the appearance of a country villa than a country parsonage. His brother, succeeding to the estates, and residing chiefly in the neighbourhood, became,

like his father before him, member for the county, and was one of the country gentlemen most looked up to in the House of Commons. A sensible and frequent, though uncommonly prosy speaker, singularly independent (for he had a clear fourteen thousand pounds a year, and did not desire office), and valuing himself on not being a party man, so that his vote on critical questions was often a matter of great doubt, and, therefore, of great moment, Sir John Merton gave considerable importance to the Rev. Charles Merton. The latter kept up all the more select of his old London acquaintances; and few country houses, at certain seasons of the year, were filled more aristocratically than the pleasant rectory-house. Mr. Merton, indeed, contrived to make the Hall a reservoir for the parsonage, and periodically drafted off the *elite* of the visitors at the former to spend a few days at the latter. This was the more easily done, as his brother was a widower, and his conversation was all of one sort,—the state of the nation and the agricultural interest. Mr. Merton was upon very friendly terms with his brother, looked after the property in the absence of Sir John, kept up the family interest, was an excellent electioneerer, a good speaker at a pinch, an able magistrate,—a man, in short, most useful in the county; on the whole, he was more popular than his brother, and almost as much looked up to—perhaps, because he was much less ostentatious. He had very good taste, had the Rev. Charles Merton!—his table plentiful, but plain—his manners affable to the low, though agreeably sycophantic to the high; and there was nothing about him that ever wounded self-love. To add to the attractions of his house, his wife, simple and good-tempered, could talk with anybody, take off the bores, and leave people to be comfortable in their own way: while he had a large family of fine children of all ages, that had long given easy and constant excuse under the name of "little children's parties," for getting up an impromptu dance or a gypsy dinner,—enlivening the neighbourhood, in short. Caroline was the eldest; then came a son, attached to a foreign ministry, and another, who, though only nineteen, was a private secretary to one of our Indian satraps. The acquaintance of these young gentlemen, thus engaged, it was therefore Evelyn's misfortune to lose the advantage of cultivating,—a loss which both Mr. and Mrs. Merton assured her was very much to be regretted. But to make up to her for such a privation there were two lovely little girls, one ten, and the other seven years old, who fell in love with Evelyn at first sight. Caroline was one of the beauties of the county, clever and conversable, "drew young men," and set the fashion to young ladies, especially when she returned from spending the season with Lady Elizabeth.

It was a delightful family!

In person, Mr. Merton was of the middle height; fair, and inclined to stoutness, with small features, beautiful teeth, and great suavity of address. Mindful still of the time when he had been "about town," he was very particular in his dress: his black coat, neatly relieved in the evening by a white underwaistcoat, and a shirt-front admirably plaited, with plain studs of dark enamel, his well-cut trousers, and elaborately polished shoes—he was good-humouredly vain of his feet and hands—won for him the common praise of the dandies (who occasionally honoured him with a visit to shoot his game, and flirt with his daughter), "That old Merton was a most gentlemanlike fellow—so d——-d neat for a parson!"

Such, mentally, morally, and physically, was the Rev. Charles Merton, rector of Merton, brother of Sir John, and possessor of an income that, what with his rich living, his wife's fortune, and his own, which was not inconsiderable, amounted to between four and five thousand pounds a year, which income, managed with judgment as well as liberality, could not fail to secure to him all the good things of this world,—the respect of his friends amongst the rest. Caroline was right when she told Evelyn that her papa was very different from a mere country parson.

Now this gentleman could not fail to see all the claims that Evelyn might fairly advance upon the esteem, nay, the veneration of himself and family: a young beauty, with a fortune of about a quarter of a million, was a phenomenon that might fairly be called celestial. Her pretensions were enhanced by her engagement to Lord Vargrave,—an engagement which might be broken; so that, as he interpreted it, the *worst* that could happen to the young lady was to marry an able and rising Minister of State,—a peer of the realm; but she was perfectly free to marry a still greater man, if she could find him; and who knows but what perhaps the *attache*, if he could get leave of absence? Mr. Merton was too sensible to pursue that thought further for the present.

The good man was greatly shocked at the too familiar manner in which Mrs. Merton spoke to this high-fated heiress, at Evelyn's travelling so far without her own maid, at her very primitive wardrobe—poor, ill-used child! Mr. Merton was a connoisseur in ladies' dress. It was quite painful to see that the unfortunate girl had been so neglected. Lady Vargrave must be a very strange person. He inquired compassionately whether she was allowed any pocket money; and finding, to his relief, that in that respect Miss Cameron was munificently supplied, he suggested that a proper abigail should be immediately engaged; that proper orders to Madame Devy should be immediately transmitted to London, with one of Evelyn's dresses, as a pattern for nothing but length and breadth. He almost stamped with vexation when he heard that Evelyn had been placed in one of the neat little rooms

generally appropriated to young lady visitors.

"She is quite contented, my dear Mr. Merton; she is so simple; she has not been brought up in the style you think for."

"Mrs. Merton," said the rector, with great solemnity, "Miss Cameron may know no better now; but what will she think of us hereafter? It is my maxim to recollect what people will be, and show them that respect which may leave pleasing impressions when they have it in their power to show us civility in return."

With many apologies, which quite overwhelmed poor Evelyn, she was transferred from the little chamber, with its French bed and bamboo-coloured washhand-stand, to an apartment with a buhl wardrobe and a four-post bed with green silk curtains, usually appropriated to the regular Christmas visitant, the Dowager Countess of Chipperton. A pretty morning room communicated with the sleeping apartment, and thence a private staircase conducted into the gardens. The whole family were duly impressed and re-impressed with her importance. No queen could be made more of. Evelyn mistook it all for pure kindness, and returned the hospitality with an affection that extended to the whole family, but particularly to the two little girls, and a beautiful black spaniel. Her dresses came down from London; her abigail arrived; the buhl wardrobe was duly filled,—and Evelyn at last learned that it is a fine thing to be rich. An account of all these proceedings was forwarded to Lady Vargrave, in a long and most complacent letter, by the rector himself. The answer was short, but it contented the excellent clergyman; for it approved of all he had done, and begged that Miss Cameron might have everything that seemed proper to her station.

By the same post came two letters to Evelyn herself,—one from Lady Vargrave, one from the curate. They transported her from the fine room and the buhl wardrobe to the cottage and the lawn; and the fine abigail, when she came to dress her young lady's hair, found her weeping.

It was a matter of great regret to the rector that it was that time of year when—precisely because the country is most beautiful—every one worth knowing is in town. Still, however, some stray guests found their way to the rectory for a day or two, and still there were some aristocratic old families in the neighbourhood, who never went up to London: so that two days in the week the rector's wine flowed, the whist-tables were set out, and the piano called into requisition.

Evelyn—the object of universal attention and admiration—was put at her ease by her station itself; for good manners come like an instinct to those on whom the world smiles. Insensibly she acquired self-possession and the smoothness of society; and if her child-like playfulness broke out from all conventional restraint, it only made more charming and brilliant the great heiress, whose delicate and fairy cast of beauty so well became her graceful *abandon* of manner, and who looked so unequivocally ladylike to the eyes that rested on Madame Devy's blondes and satins.

Caroline was not so gay as she had been at the cottage. Something seemed to weigh upon her spirits: she was often moody and thoughtful. She was the only one in the family not good-tempered; and her peevish replies to her parents, when no visitor imposed a check on the family circle, inconceivably pained Evelyn, and greatly contrasted the flow of spirits which distinguished her when she found somebody worth listening to. Still Evelyn—who, where she once liked, found it difficult to withdraw regard—sought to overlook Caroline's blemishes, and to persuade herself of a thousand good qualities below the surface; and her generous nature found constant opportunity of venting itself in costly gifts, selected from the London parcels, with which the officious Mr. Merton relieved the monotony of the rectory. These gifts Caroline could not refuse without paining her young friend. She took them reluctantly, for, to do her justice, Caroline, though ambitious, was not mean.

Thus time passed in the rectory, in gay variety and constant entertainment; and all things combined to spoil the heiress, if, indeed, goodness ever is spoiled by kindness and prosperity. Is it to the frost or to the sunshine that the flower opens its petals, or the fruit ripens from the blossom?

CHAPTER III.

Rod. How sweet these solitary places are!

. . . . . .

Ped. What strange musick
Was that we heard afar off?

Curio. We've told you what he is, what time we've sought him,

His nature and his name.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER. *The Pilgrim*.

ONE day, as the ladies were seated in Mrs. Merton's morning-room, Evelyn, who had been stationed by the window hearing the little Cecilia go through the French verbs, and had just finished that agreeable task, exclaimed,—

"Do tell me to whom that old house belongs, with the picturesque gable-end and Gothic turrets, there, just peeping through the trees,—I have always forgot to ask you."

"Oh, my dear Miss Cameron," said Mrs. Merton, "that is Burleigh; have you not been there? How stupid in Caroline not to show it to you! It is one of the lions of the place. It belongs to a man you have often heard of,—Mr. Maltravers."

"Indeed!" cried Evelyn; and she gazed with new interest on the gray melancholy pile, as the sunshine brought it into strong contrast with the dark pines around it. "And Mr. Maltravers himself—?"

"Is still abroad, I believe; though I did hear the other day that he was shortly expected at Burleigh. It is a curious old place, though much neglected. I believe, indeed, it has not been furnished since the time of Charles the First. (Cissy, my love, don't stoop so.) Very gloomy, in my opinion; and not any fine room in the house, except the library, which was once a chapel. However, people come miles to see it."

"Will you go there to-day?" said Caroline, languidly; "it is a very pleasant walk through the glebe-land and the wood,—not above half a mile by the foot-path."

"I should like it so much."

"Yes," said Mrs. Merton, "and you had better go before he returns,—he is so strange. He does not allow it to be seen when he is down. But, indeed, he has only been once at the old place since he was of age. (Sophy, you will tear Miss Cameron's scarf to pieces; do be quiet, child.) That was before he was a great man; he was then very odd, saw no society, only dined once with us, though Mr. Merton paid him every attention. They show the room in which he wrote his books."

"I remember him very well, though I was then but a child," said
Caroline,—"a handsome, thoughtful face."

"Did you think so, my dear? Fine eyes and teeth, certainly, and a commanding figure, but nothing more."

"Well," said Caroline, "if you like to go, Evelyn, I am at your service."

"And—I—Evy, dear—I—may go," said Cecilia, clinging to Evelyn.

"And me, too," lisped Sophia, the youngest hope,—"there's such a pretty peacock."

"Oh, yes, they may go, Mrs. Merton, we'll take such care of them."

"Very well, my dear; Miss Cameron quite spoils you."

Evelyn tripped away to put on her bonnet, and the children ran after her, clapping their hands,—they could not bear to lose sight of her for a moment.

"Caroline," said Mrs. Merton, affectionately, "are you not well? You have seemed pale lately, and not in your usual spirits."

"Oh, yes, I'm well enough," answered Caroline, rather peevishly; "but this place is so dull now; very provoking that Lady Elizabeth does not go to London this year."

"My dear, it will be gayer, I hope, in July, when the races at Knaresdean begin; and Lord Vargrave has promised to come."

"Has Lord Vargrave written to you lately?"

"No, my dear."

"Very odd."

"Does Evelyn ever talk of him?"

"Not much," said Caroline, rising and quitting the room.

It was a most cheerful exhilarating day,—the close of sweet May; the hedges were white with blossoms; a light breeze rustled the young leaves; the butterflies had ventured forth, and the children chased them over the grass, as Evelyn and Caroline, who walked much too slow for her companion (Evelyn longed to run), followed them soberly towards Burleigh.

They passed the glebe-fields; and a little bridge, thrown over a brawling rivulet, conducted them into a wood.

"This stream," said Caroline, "forms the boundary between my uncle's estates and those of Mr. Maltravers. It must be very unpleasant to so proud a man as Mr. Maltravers is said to be, to have the land of another proprietor so near his house. He could hear my uncle's gun from his very drawing-room. However, Sir John takes care not to molest him. On the other side, the Burleigh estates extend for some miles; indeed, Mr. Maltravers is the next great proprietor to my uncle in this part of the county. Very strange that he does not marry! There, now you can see the house."

The mansion lay somewhat low, with hanging woods in the rear: and the old-fashioned fish-ponds gleaming in the sunshine and overshadowed by gigantic trees increased the venerable stillness of its aspect. Ivy and innumerable creepers covered one side of the house; and long weeds cumbered the deserted road.

"It is sadly neglected," said Caroline; "and was so, even in the last owner's life. Mr. Maltravers inherits the place from his mother's uncle. We may as well enter the house by the private way. The front entrance is kept locked up."

Winding by a path that conducted into a flower-garden, divided from the park by a ha-ha, over which a plank and a small gate, rusting off its hinges, were placed, Caroline led the way towards the building. At this point of view it presented a large bay window that by a flight of four steps led into the garden. On one side rose a square, narrow turret, surmounted by a gilt dome and quaint weathercock, below the architrave of which was a sun-dial, set in the stonework; and another dial stood in the garden, with the common and beautiful motto,—

"Non numero horas, nisi serenas!"*

* "I number not the hours, unless sunny."

On the other side of the bay window a huge buttress cast its mass of shadow. There was something in the appearance of the whole place that invited to contemplation and repose,—something almost monastic. The gayety of the teeming spring-time could not divest the spot of a certain sadness, not displeasing, however, whether to the young, to whom there is a luxury in the vague sentiment of melancholy, or to those who, having known real griefs, seek for an anodyne in meditation and memory. The low lead-coloured door, set deep in the turret, was locked, and the bell beside it broken. Caroline turned impatiently away. "We must go round to the other side," said she, "and try to make the deaf old man hear us."

"Oh, Carry!" cried Cecilia, "the great window is open;" and she ran up the steps.

"That is lucky," said Caroline; and the rest followed Cecilia.

Evelyn now stood within the library of which Mrs. Merton had spoken. It was a large room, about fifty feet in length, and proportionably wide; somewhat dark, for the light came only from the one large window through which they entered; and though the window rose to the cornice of the ceiling, and took up one side of the apartment, the daylight was subdued by the heaviness of the stonework in which the narrow panes were set, and by the glass stained with armorial bearings in the upper part of the casement. The bookcases, too, were of the dark oak which so much absorbs the light; and the gilding, formerly meant to relieve them, was discoloured by time.

The room was almost disproportionably lofty; the ceiling, elaborately coved, and richly carved with grotesque masks, preserved the Gothic character of the age in which it had been devoted to a religious purpose. Two fireplaces, with high chimney-pieces of oak, in which were inserted two portraits, broke the symmetry of the tall bookcases. In one of these fireplaces were half-burnt logs; and a huge armchair, with a small reading-desk beside it, seemed to bespeak the recent occupation of the room. On the fourth side, opposite the window, the wall was covered with faded tapestry, representing the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; the arras was nailed over doors on either hand,—the chinks between the door and the wall serving, in one instance, to cut off in the middle his wise majesty, who was making a low bow; while in the other it took the ground from under the wanton queen, just as she was descending from her chariot.

Near the window stood a grand piano, the only modern article in the room, save one of the portraits,

presently to be described. On all this Evelyn gazed silently and devoutly: she had naturally that reverence for genius which is common to the enthusiastic and young; and there is, even to the dullest, a certain interest in the homes of those who have implanted within us a new thought. But here there was, she imagined, a rare and singular harmony between the place and the mental characteristics of the owner. She fancied she now better understood the shadowy and metaphysical repose of thought that had distinguished the earlier writings of Maltravers,—the writings composed or planned in this still retreat.

But what particularly caught her attention was one of the two portraits that adorned the mantelpieces. The further one was attired in the rich and fanciful armour of the time of Elizabeth; the head bare, the helmet on a table on which the hand rested. It was a handsome and striking countenance; and an inscription announced it to be a Digby, an ancestor of Maltravers.

But the other was a beautiful girl of about eighteen, in the now almost antiquated dress of forty years ago. The features were delicate, but the colours somewhat faded, and there was something mournful in the expression. A silk curtain, drawn on one side, seemed to denote how carefully it was prized by the possessor.

Evelyn turned for explanation to her cicerone.

"This is the second time I have seen that picture," said Caroline; "for it is only by great entreaty and as a mysterious favour that the old housekeeper draws aside the veil. Some touch of sentiment in Maltravers makes him regard it as sacred. It is the picture of his mother before she married; she died in giving him birth."

Evelyn sighed; how well she understood the sentiment which seemed to Caroline so eccentric! The countenance fascinated her; the eye seemed to follow her as she turned.

"As a proper pendant to this picture," said Caroline, "he ought to have dismissed the effigies of yon warlike gentleman, and replaced it by one of poor Lady Florence Lascelles, for whose loss he is said to have quitted his country: but, perhaps, it was the loss of her fortune."

"How can you say so?—fie!" cried Evelyn, with a burst of generous indignation.

"Ah, my dear, you heiresses have a fellow-feeling with each other! Nevertheless, clever men are less sentimental than we deem them. Heigho! this quiet room gives me the spleen, I fancy."

"Dearest Evy," whispered Cecilia, "I think you have a look of that pretty picture, only you are much prettier. Do take off your bonnet; your hair just falls down like hers."

Evelyn shook her head gravely; but the spoiled child hastily untied the ribbons and snatched away the hat, and Evelyn's sunny ringlets fell down in beautiful disorder. There was no resemblance between Evelyn and the portrait, except in the colour of the hair, and the careless fashion it now by chance assumed. Yet Evelyn was pleased to think that a likeness did exist, though Caroline declared it was a most unflattering compliment.

"I don't wonder," said the latter, changing the theme,—"I don't wonder Mr. Maltravers lives so little in this 'Castle Dull;' yet it might be much improved. French windows and plate-glass, for instance; and if those lumbering bookshelves and horrid old chimney-pieces were removed and the ceiling painted white and gold like that in my uncle's saloon, and a rich, lively paper, instead of the tapestry, it would really make a very fine ballroom."

"Let us have a dance here now," cried Cecilia. "Come, stand up, Sophy;" and the children began to practise a waltz step, tumbling over each other, and laughing in full glee.

"Hush, hush!" said Evelyn, softly. She had never before checked the children's mirth, and she could not tell why she did so now.

"I suppose the old butler has been entertaining the bailiff here," said
Caroline, pointing to the remains of the fire.

"And is this the room he chiefly inhabited,—the room that you say they show as his?"

"No; that tapestry door to the right leads into a little study where he wrote." So saying, Caroline tried to open the door, but it was locked from within. She then opened the other door, which showed a long wainscoted passage, hung with rusty pikes, and a few breastplates of the time of the Parliamentary Wars. "This leads to the main body of the House," said Caroline, "from which the room we are now in and the little study are completely detached, having, as you know, been the chapel in popish times. I have heard that Sir Kenelm Digby, an ancestral connection of the present owner, first converted them

into their present use, and, in return, built the village church on the other side of the park."

Sir Kenelm Digby, the old cavalier philosopher!—-a new name of interest to consecrate the place! Evelyn could have lingered all day in the room; and perhaps as an excuse for a longer sojourn, hastened to the piano—it was open—she ran her fairy fingers over the keys, and the sound from the untuned and neglected instrument thrilled wild and spiritlike through the melancholy chamber.

"Oh, do sing us something, Evy," cried Cecilia, running up to, and drawing a chair to, the instrument.

"Do, Evelyn," said Caroline, languidly; "it will serve to bring one of the servants to us, and save us a journey to the offices."

It was just what Evelyn wished. Some verses, which her mother especially loved, verses written by Maltravers upon returning after absence to his own home, had rushed into her mind as she had touched the keys. They were appropriate to the place, and had been beautifully set to music. So the children hushed themselves, and nestled at her feet; and after a little prelude, keeping the accompaniment under, that the spoiled instrument might not mar the sweet words and sweeter voice, she began the song.

Meanwhile in the adjoining room, the little study which Caroline had spoken of, sat the owner of the house! He had returned suddenly and unexpectedly the previous night. The old steward was in attendance at the moment, full of apologies, congratulations, and gossip; and Maltravers, grown a stern and haughty man, was already impatiently turning away, when he heard the sudden sound of the children's laughter and loud voices in the room beyond. Maltravers frowned.

"What impertinence is this?" said he in a tone that, though very calm, made the steward quake in his shoes.

"I don't know, really, your honour; there be so many grand folks come to see the house in the fine weather, that—"

"And you permit your master's house to be a raree-show? You do well, sir."

"If your honour were more amongst us, there might be more discipline like," said the steward, stoutly; "but no one in my time has cared so little for the old place as those it belongs to."

"Fewer words with me, sir," said Maltravers, haughtily; "and now go and inform those people that I am returned, and wish for no guests but those I invite myself."

"Sir!"

"Do you not hear me? Say that if it so please them, these old ruins are my property, and are not to be jobbed out to the insolence of public curiosity. Go, sir."

"But—I beg pardon, your honour—if they be great folks?"

"Great folks!—great! Ay, there it is. Why, if they be great folks, they have great houses of their own, Mr. Justis."

The steward stared. "Perhaps, your honour," he put in, deprecatingly, "they be Mr. Merton's family: they come very often when the London gentlemen are with them."

"Merton!—oh, the cringing parson. Harkye! one word more with me, sir, and you quit my service to-morrow."

Mr. Justis lifted his eyes and hands to heaven; but there was something in his master's voice and look which checked reply, and he turned slowly to the door—when a voice of such heavenly sweetness was heard without that it arrested his own step and made the stern Maltravers start in his seat. He held up his hand to the steward to delay his errand, and listened, charmed and spell-bound. His own words came on his ear,—words long unfamiliar to him, and at first but imperfectly remembered; words connected with the early and virgin years of poetry and aspiration; words that were as the ghosts of thoughts now far too gentle for his altered soul. He bowed down his head, and the dark shade left his brow.

The song ceased. Maltravers moved with a sigh, and his eyes rested on the form of the steward with his hand on the door.

"Shall I give your honour's message?" said Mr. Justis, gravely.

"No; take care for the future; leave me now."

Mr. Justis made one leg, and then, well pleased, took to both.

"Well," thought he, as he departed, "how foreign parts do spoil a gentleman! so mild as he was once! I must botch up the accounts, I see,—the squire has grown sharp."

As Evelyn concluded her song, she—whose charm in singing was that she sang from the heart—was so touched by the melancholy music of the air and words, that her voice faltered, and the last line died inaudibly on her lips.

The children sprang up and kissed her.

"Oh," cried Cecilia, "there is the beautiful peacock!" And there, indeed, on the steps without—perhaps attracted by the music—stood the picturesque bird. The children ran out to greet their old favourite, who was extremely tame; and presently Cecilia returned.

"Oh, Carry! do see what beautiful horses are coming up the park!"

Caroline, who was a good rider, and fond of horses, and whose curiosity was always aroused by things connected with show and station, suffered the little girl to draw her into the garden. Two grooms, each mounted on a horse of the pure Arabian breed, and each leading another, swathed and bandaged, were riding slowly up the road; and Caroline was so attracted by the novel appearance of the animals in a place so deserted that she followed the children towards them, to learn who could possibly be their enviable owner. Evelyn, forgotten for the moment, remained alone. She was pleased at being so, and once more turned to the picture which had so attracted her before. The mild eyes fixed on her, with an expression that recalled to her mind her own mother.

"And," thought she, as she gazed, "this fair creature did not live to know the fame of her son, to rejoice in his success, or to soothe his grief. And he, that son, a disappointed and solitary exile in distant lands, while strangers stand within his deserted hall!"

The images she had conjured up moved and absorbed her; and she continued to stand before the picture, gazing upward with moistened eyes. It was a beautiful vision as she thus stood, with her delicate bloom, her luxuriant hair (for the hat was not yet replaced), her elastic form, so full of youth and health and hope,—the living form beside the faded canvas of the dead, once youthful, tender, lovely as herself! Evelyn turned away with a sigh; the sigh was re-echoed yet more deeply. She started: the door that led to the study was opened, and in the aperture was the figure of a man in the prime of life. His hair, still luxuriant as in his earliest youth, though darkened by the suns of the East, curled over a forehead of majestic expanse. The high and proud features, that well became a stature above the ordinary standard; the pale but bronzed complexion; the large eyes of deepest blue, shaded by dark brows and lashes; and more than all, that expression at once of passion and repose which characterizes the old Italian portraits, and seems to denote the inscrutable power that experience imparts to intellect, constituted an *ensemble* which, if not faultlessly handsome, was eminently striking, and formed at once to interest and command. It was a face, once seen, never to be forgotten; it was a face that had long, half unconsciously, haunted Evelyn's young dreams; it was a face she had seen before, though, then younger and milder and fairer, it wore a different aspect.

Evelyn stood rooted to the spot, feeling herself blush to her very temples,—an enchanting picture of bashful confusion and innocent alarm.

"Do not let me regret my return," said the stranger, approaching after a short pause, and with much gentleness in his voice and smile; "and think that the owner is doomed to scare away the fair spirits that haunted the spot in his absence."

"The owner!" repeated Evelyn, almost inaudibly, and in increased embarrassment; "are you then the —the—"

"Yes," courteously interrupted the stranger, seeing her confusion, "my name is Maltravers; and I am to blame for not having informed you of my sudden return, or for now trespassing on your presence. But you see my excuse;" and he pointed to the instrument. "You have the magic that draws even the serpent from his hole. But you are not alone?"

"Oh, no! no, indeed! Miss Merton is with me. I know not where she is gone. I will seek her."

"Miss Merton! You are not then one of that family?"

"No, only a guest. I will find her; she must apologize for us. We were not aware that you were here,—indeed we were not."

"That is a cruel excuse," said Maltravers, smiling at her eagerness: and the smile and the look

reminded her yet more forcibly of the time when he had carried her in his arms and soothed her suffering and praised her courage and pressed the kiss almost of a lover on her hand. At that thought she blushed yet more deeply, and yet more eagerly turned to escape.

Maltravers did not seek to detain her, but silently followed her steps. She had scarcely gained the window, before little Cecilia scampered in, crying,—

"Only think! Mr. Maltravers has come back, and brought such beautiful horses!"

Cecilia stopped abruptly, as she caught sight of the stranger; and the next moment Caroline herself appeared. Her worldly experience and quick sense saw immediately what had chanced; and she hastened to apologize to Maltravers, and congratulate him on his return, with an ease that astonished poor Evelyn, and by no means seemed appreciated by Maltravers himself. He replied with brief and haughty courtesy.

"My father," continued Caroline, "will be so glad to hear you are come back. He will hasten to pay you his respects, and apologize for his truants. But I have not formally introduced you to my fellow-offender. My dear, let me present to you one whom Fame has already made known to you; Mr. Maltravers, Miss Cameron, step-daughter," she added in a lower voice, "to the late Lord Vargrave."

At the first part of this introduction Maltravers frowned; at the last he forgot all displeasure.

"Is it possible? I *thought* I had seen you before, but in a dream. Ah, then we are not quite strangers!"

Evelyn's eye met his, and though she coloured and strove to look grave, a half smile brought out the dimples that played round her arch lips.

"But you do not remember me?" added Maltravers.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Evelyn, with a sudden impulse; and then checked herself.

Caroline came to her friend's relief.

"What is this? You surprise me; where did you ever see Mr. Maltravers before?"

"I can answer that question, Miss Merton. When Miss Cameron was but a child, as high as my little friend here, an accident on the road procured me her acquaintance; and the sweetness and fortitude she then displayed left an impression on me not worn out even to this day. And thus we meet again," added Maltravers, in a muttered voice, as to himself. "How strange a thing life is!"

"Well," said Miss Merton, "we must intrude on you no more,—you have so much to do. I am so sorry Sir John is not down to welcome you; but I hope we shall be good neighbours. *Au revoir*!"

And, fancying herself most charming, Caroline bowed, smiled, and walked off with her train. Maltravers paused irresolute. If Evelyn had looked back, he would have accompanied them home; but Evelyn did not look back,—and he stayed.

Miss Merton rallied her young friend unmercifully, as they walked homeward, and she extracted a very brief and imperfect history of the adventure that had formed the first acquaintance, and of the interview by which it had been renewed. But Evelyn did not heed her; and the moment they arrived at the rectory, she hastened to shut herself in her room, and write the account of her adventure to her mother. How often, in her girlish reveries, had she thought of that incident, that stranger! And now, by such a chance, and after so many years, to meet the Unknown by his own hearth! and that Unknown to be Maltravers! It was as if a dream had come true. While she was yet musing—and the letter not yet begun—she heard the sound of joy-bells in the distance. At once she divined the cause; it was the welcome of the wanderer to his solitary home!

CHAPTER IV.

MAIS en connaissant votre condition naturelle, usez des moyens qui lui sont propres, et ne pretendez pas regner par une autre voie que par celle qui vous fait roi.*—PASCAL.

* "But in understanding your natural condition, use the means which are proper to it; and pretend not to govern by any other way than by that which constitutes you governor."

IN the heart as in the ocean, the great tides ebb and flow. The waves which had once urged on the spirit of Ernest Maltravers to the rocks and shoals of active life had long since receded back upon the calm depths, and left the strand bare. With a melancholy and disappointed mind, he had quitted the

land of his birth; and new scenes, strange and wild, had risen before his wandering gaze. Wearied with civilization, and sated with many of the triumphs for which civilized men drudge and toil, and disquiet themselves in vain, he had plunged amongst hordes, scarce redeemed from primeval barbarism. The adventures through which he had passed, and in which life itself could only be preserved by wary vigilance and ready energies, had forced him, for a while, from the indulgence of morbid contemplations. His heart, indeed, had been left inactive; but his intellect and his physical powers had been kept in hourly exercise. He returned to the world of his equals with a mind laden with the treasures of a various and vast experience, and with much of the same gloomy moral as that which, on emerging from the Catacombs, assured the restless speculations of Rasselas of the vanity of human life and the folly of moral aspirations.

Ernest Maltravers, never a faultless or completed character, falling short in practice of his own capacities, moral and intellectual, from his very desire to overpass the limits of the Great and Good, was seemingly as far as heretofore from the grand secret of life. It was not so in reality; his mind had acquired what before it wanted,—*hardness*; and we are nearer to true virtue and true happiness when we demand too little from men than when we exact too much.

Nevertheless, partly from the strange life that had thrown him amongst men whom safety itself made it necessary to command despotically, partly from the habit of power and disdain of the world, his nature was incrusted with a stern imperiousness of manner, often approaching to the harsh and morose, though beneath it lurked generosity and benevolence.

Many of his younger feelings, more amiable and complex, had settled into one predominant quality, which more or less had always characterized him,—Pride! Self-esteem made inactive, and Ambition made discontented, usually engender haughtiness. In Maltravers this quality, which, properly controlled and duly softened, is the essence and life of honour, was carried to a vice. He was perfectly conscious of its excess, but he cherished it as a virtue. Pride had served to console him in sorrow, and therefore it was a friend; it had supported him when disgusted with fraud, or in resistance to violence, and therefore it was a champion and a fortress. It was a pride of a peculiar sort: it attached itself to no one point in especial,—not to talent, knowledge, mental gifts, still less to the vulgar commonplaces of birth and fortune; it rather resulted from a supreme and wholesale contempt of all other men, and all their objects,—of ambition, of glory, of the hard business of life. His favourite virtue was fortitude; it was on this that he now mainly valued himself. He was proud of his struggles against others, prouder still of conquests over his own passions. He looked upon FATE as the arch enemy against whose attacks we should ever prepare. He fancied that against fate he had thoroughly schooled himself. In the arrogance of his heart he said, "I can defy the future." He believed in the boast of the vain old sage,—"I am a world to myself!" In the wild career through which his later manhood had passed, it is true that he had not carried his philosophy into a rejection of the ordinary world. The shock occasioned by the death of Florence yielded gradually to time and change; and he had passed from the deserts of Africa and the East to the brilliant cities of Europe. But neither his heart nor his reason had ever again been enslaved by his passions. Never again had he known the softness of affection. Had he done so, the ice had been thawed, and the fountain had flowed once more into the great deeps. He had returned to England,—he scarce knew wherefore, or with what intent, certainly not with any idea of entering again upon the occupations of active life; it was, perhaps, only the weariness of foreign scenes and unfamiliar tongues, and the vague, unsettled desire of change, that brought him back to the fatherland. But he did not allow so unphilosophical a cause to himself: and, what was strange, he would not allow one much more amiable, and which was, perhaps, the truer cause,—the increasing age and infirmities of his old guardian, Cleveland, who prayed him affectionately to return. Maltravers did not like to believe that his heart was still so kind. Singular form of pride! No, he rather sought to persuade himself that he intended to sell Burleigh, to arrange his affairs finally, and then quit forever his native land. To prove to himself that this was the case, he had intended at Dover to hurry at once to Burleigh, and merely write to Cleveland that he was returned to England. But his heart would not suffer him to enjoy this cruel luxury of self-mortification, and his horses' heads were turned to Richmond when within a stage of London. He had spent two days with the good old man, and those two days had so warmed and softened his feelings that he was quite appalled at his own dereliction from fixed principles! However, he went before Cleveland had time to discover that he was changed; and the old man had promised to visit him shortly.

This, then, was the state of Ernest Maltravers at the age of thirty-six,—an age in which frame and mind are in their fullest perfection; an age in which men begin most keenly to feel that they are citizens. With all his energies braced and strengthened; with his mind stored with profusest gifts; in the vigour of a constitution to which a hardy life had imparted a second and fresher youth; so trained by stern experience as to redeem with an easy effort all the deficiencies and faults which had once resulted from too sensitive an imagination and too high a standard for human actions; formed to render to his race the most brilliant and durable service, and to secure to himself the happiness which results

from sobered fancy, a generous heart, and an approving conscience,—here was Ernest Maltravers, backed, too, by the appliances and gifts of birth and fortune, perversely shutting up genius, life, and soul in their own thorny leaves, and refusing to serve the fools and rascals who were formed from the same clay, and gifted by the same God. Morbid and morose philosophy, begot by a proud spirit on a lonely heart!

CHAPTER V.

LET such amongst us as are willing to be children again, if it be only for an hour, resign ourselves to the sweet enchantment that steals upon the spirit when it indulges in the memory of early and innocent enjoyment.
D. L. RICHARDSON.

AT dinner, Caroline's lively recital of their adventures was received with much interest, not only by the Merton family, but by some of the neighbouring gentry who shared the rector's hospitality. The sudden return of any proprietor to his old hereditary seat after a prolonged absence makes some sensation in a provincial neighbourhood. In this case, where the proprietor was still young, unmarried, celebrated, and handsome, the sensation was of course proportionably increased. Caroline and Evelyn were beset by questions, to which the former alone gave any distinct reply. Caroline's account was, on the whole, gracious and favourable, and seemed complimentary to all but Evelyn, who thought that Caroline was a very indifferent portrait-painter.

It seldom happens that a man is a prophet in his own neighbourhood; but Maltravers had been so little in the county, and in his former visit his life had been so secluded, that he was regarded as a stranger. He had neither outshone the establishments nor interfered with the sporting of his fellow-squires; and on the whole, they made just allowance for his habits of distant reserve. Time, and his retirement from the busy scene, long enough to cause him to be missed, not long enough for new favourites to supply his place, had greatly served to mellow and consolidate his reputation, and his country was proud to claim him. Thus (though Maltravers would not have believed it had an angel told him) he was not spoken ill of behind his back: a thousand little anecdotes of his personal habits, of his generosity, independence of spirit, and eccentricity were told. Evelyn listened in rapt delight to all; she had never passed so pleasant an evening; and she smiled almost gratefully on the rector, who was a man that always followed the stream, when he said with benign affability, "We must really show our distinguished neighbour every attention,—we must be indulgent to his little oddities. His politics are not mine, to be sure; but a man who has a stake in the country has a right to his own opinion, that was always my maxim,—thank Heaven, I am a very moderate man. We must draw him amongst us; it will be our own fault, I am sure, if he is not quite domesticated at the rectory."

"With such attraction,—yes," said the thin curate, timidly bowing to the ladies.

"It would be a nice match for Miss Caroline," whispered an old lady; Caroline overheard, and pouted her pretty lip. The whist-tables were now set out, the music began, and Maltravers was left in peace.

The next day Mr. Merton rode his pony over to Burleigh. Maltravers was not at home. He left his card, and a note of friendly respect, begging Mr. Maltravers to waive ceremony, and dine with them the next day. Somewhat to the surprise of the rector, he found that the active spirit of Maltravers was already at work. The long-deserted grounds were filled with labourers; the carpenters were busy at the fences; the house looked alive and stirring; the grooms were exercising the horses in the park,—all betokened the return of the absentee. This seemed to denote that Maltravers had come to reside; and the rector thought of Caroline, and was pleased at the notion.

The next day was Cecilia's birthday,—and birthdays were kept at Merton Rectory; the neighbouring children were invited. They were to dine on the lawn, in a large marquee, and to dance in the evening. The hothouses yielded their early strawberries, and the cows, decorated with blue ribbons, were to give syllabubs. The polite Caroline was not greatly fascinated by pleasure of this kind; she graciously appeared at dinner, kissed the prettiest of the children, helped them to soup, and then, having done her duty, retired to her room to write letters. The children were not sorry, for they were a little afraid of the grand Caroline; and they laughed much more loudly, and made much more noise, when she was gone—and the cake and strawberries appeared.

Evelyn was in her element; she had, as a child, mixed so little with children, she had so often yearned for playmates, she was still so childlike. Besides, she was so fond of Cecilia, she had looked forward with innocent delight to the day; and a week before had taken the carriage to the neighbouring town to return with a carefully concealed basket of toys,—dolls, sashes, and picture-books. But somehow or

other, she did not feel so childlike as usual that morning; her heart was away from the pleasure before her, and her smile was at first languid. But in children's mirth there is something so contagious to those who love children; and now, as the party scattered themselves on the grass, and Evelyn opened the basket, and bade them with much gravity keep quiet, and be good children, she was the happiest of the whole group. But she knew how to give pleasure: and the basket was presented to Cecilia, that the little queen of the day might enjoy the luxury of being generous; and to prevent jealousy, the notable expedient of a lottery was suggested.

"Then Evy shall be Fortune!" cried Cecilia; "nobody will be sorry to get anything from Evy,—and if any one is discontented Evy sha'n't kiss her."

Mrs. Merton, whose motherly heart was completely won by Evelyn's kindness to the children, forgot all her husband's lectures, and willingly ticketed the prizes, and wrote the numbers of the lots on slips of paper carefully folded. A large old Indian jar was dragged from the drawing-room and constituted the fated urn; the tickets were deposited therein, and Cecilia was tying the handkerchief round Evelyn's eyes,—while Fortune struggled archly not to be as blind as she ought to be,—and the children, seated in a circle, were in full joy and expectation when there was a sudden pause. The laughter stopped; so did Cissy's little hands. What could it be? Evelyn slipped the bandage, and her eyes rested on Maltravers!

"Well, really, my dear Miss Cameron," said the rector, who was by the side of the intruder, and who, indeed, had just brought him to the spot, "I don't know what these little folks will do to you next."

"I ought rather to be their victim," said Maltravers, good-humouredly; "the fairies always punish us grown-up mortals for trespassing on their revels."

While he spoke, his eyes—those eyes, the most eloquent in the world—dwelt on Evelyn (as, to cover her blushes, she took Cecilia in her arms, and appeared to attend to nothing else) with a look of such admiration and delight as a mortal might well be supposed to cast on some beautiful fairy.

Sophy, a very bold child, ran up to him. "How do, sir?" she lisped, putting up her face to be kissed; "how's the pretty peacock?"

This opportune audacity served at once to renew the charm that had been broken,—to unite the stranger with the children. Here was acquaintance claimed and allowed in an instant. The next moment Maltravers was one of the circle, on the turf with the rest, as gay, and almost as noisy,—that hard, proud man, so disdainful of the trifles of the world!

"But the gentleman must have a prize, too," said Sophy, proud of her tall new friend. "What's your other name; why do you have such a long, hard name?"

"Call me Ernest," said Maltravers.

"Why don't we begin?" cried the children.

"Evy, come, be a good child, miss," said Sophy, as Evelyn, vexed and ashamed, and half ready to cry, resisted the bandage.

Mr. Merton interposed his authority; but the children clamoured, and Evelyn hastily yielded. It was Fortune's duty to draw the tickets from the urn, and give them to each claimant whose name was called; when it came to the turn of Maltravers, the bandage did not conceal the blush and smile of the enchanting goddess, and the hand of the aspirant thrilled as it touched hers.

The children burst into screams of laughter when Cecilia gravely awarded to Maltravers the worst prize in the lot,—a blue ribbon,—which Sophy, however, greedily insisted on having; but Maltravers would not yield it.

Maltravers remained all day at the rectory, and shared in the ball,—yes, he danced with Evelyn—he, Maltravers, who had never been known to dance since he was twenty-two! The ice was fairly broken,—Maltravers was at home with the Mertons. And when he took his solitary walk to his solitary house—over the little bridge, and through the shadowy wood—astonished, perhaps, with himself, every one of the guests, from the oldest to the youngest, pronounced him delightful. Caroline, perhaps, might have been piqued some months ago that he did not dance with *her*; but now, her heart—such as it was—felt preoccupied.

CHAPTER VI.

L'ESPRIT de l'homme est plus penetrant que consequent, et embrasse plus qu'il ne peat lier.*—VAUVENARGUES.

* "The spirit of man is more penetrating than logical, and gathers more than it can garner."

AND now Maltravers was constantly with the Merton family; there was no need of excuse for familiarity on his part. Mr. Merton, charmed to find his advances not rejected, thrust intimacy upon him.

One day they spent the afternoon at Burleigh, and Evelyn and Caroline finished their survey of the house,—tapestry, and armour, pictures and all. This led to a visit to the Arabian horses. Caroline observed that she was very fond of riding, and went into ecstasies with one of the animals,—the one, of course, with the longest tail. The next day the horse was in the stables at the rectory, and a gallant epistle apologized for the costly gift.

Mr. Merton demurred, but Caroline always had her own way; and so the horse remained (no doubt, in much amazement and disdain) with the parson's pony, and the brown carriage horses. The gift naturally conduced to parties on horseback—it was cruel entirely to separate the Arab from his friends —and how was Evelyn to be left behind?—Evelyn, who had never yet ridden anything more spirited than an old pony! A beautiful little horse belonging to an elderly lady, now growing too stout to ride, was to be sold hard by. Maltravers discovered the treasure, and apprised Mr. Merton of it—he was too delicate to affect liberality to the rich heiress. The horse was bought; nothing could go quieter; Evelyn was not at all afraid. They made two or three little excursions. Sometimes only Mr. Merton and Maltravers accompanied the young ladies, sometimes the party was more numerous. Maltravers appeared to pay equal attention to Caroline and her friend; still Evelyn's inexperience in equestrian matters was an excuse for his being ever by her side. They had a thousand opportunities to converse; and Evelyn now felt more at home with him; her gentle gayety, her fanciful yet chastened intellect, found a voice. Maltravers was not slow to discover that beneath her simplicity there lurked sense, judgment, and imagination. Insensibly his own conversation took a higher flight. With the freedom which his mature years and reputation gave him, he mingled eloquent instruction with lighter and more trifling subjects; be directed her earnest and docile mind, not only to new fields of written knowledge, but to many of the secrets of Nature, subtle or sublime. He had a wide range of scientific as well as literary lore; the stars, the flowers, the phenomena of the physical world, afforded themes on which he descanted with the fervent love of a poet and the easy knowledge of a sage.

Mr. Merton, observing that little or nothing of sentiment mingled with their familiar intercourse, felt perfectly at ease; and knowing that Maltravers had been intimate with Lumley, he naturally concluded that he was aware of the engagement between Evelyn and his friend. Meanwhile Maltravers appeared unconscious that such a being as Lord Vargrave existed.

It is not to be wondered at that the daily presence, the delicate flattery of attention from a man like Maltravers, should strongly impress the imagination, if not the heart, of a susceptible girl. Already prepossessed in his favour, and wholly unaccustomed to a society which combined so many attractions, Evelyn regarded him with unspeakable veneration; to the darker shades in his character she was blind, —to her, indeed, they did not appear. True that once or twice in mixed society his disdainful and imperious temper broke hastily and harshly forth. To folly, to pretension, to presumption, he showed but slight forbearance. The impatient smile, the biting sarcasm, the cold repulse, that might gall, yet could scarce be openly resented, betrayed that he was one who affected to free himself from the polished restraints of social intercourse. He had once been too scrupulous in not wounding vanity; he was now too indifferent to it. But if sometimes this unamiable trait of character, as displayed to others, chilled or startled Evelyn, the contrast of his manner towards herself was a flattery too delicious not to efface all other recollections. To her ear his voice always softened its tone; to her capacity of mind ever bent as by sympathy, not condescension; to her—the young, the timid, the half-informed—to her alone he did not disdain to exhibit all the stores of his knowledge, all the best and brightest colours of his mind. She modestly wondered at so strange a preference. Perhaps a sudden and blunt compliment which Maltravers once addressed to her may explain it. One day, when she had conversed more freely and more fully than usual, he broke in upon her with this abrupt exclamation,—

"Miss Cameron, you must have associated from your childhood with beautiful minds. I see already that from the world, vile as it is, you have nothing of contagion to fear. I have heard you talk on the most various matters, on many of which your knowledge is imperfect; but you have never uttered one mean idea, or one false sentiment. Truth seems intuitive to you."

It was indeed this singular purity of heart which made to the world-wearied man the chief charm in Evelyn Cameron. From this purity came, as from the heart of a poet, a thousand new and heaven-taught thoughts which had in them a wisdom of their own,—thoughts that often brought the stern listener

back to youth, and reconciled him with life. The wise Maltravers learned more from Evelyn than Evelyn did from Maltravers.

There was, however, another trait—deeper than that of temper—in Maltravers, and which was, unlike the latter, more manifest to her than to others,—his contempt for all the things her young and fresh enthusiasm had been taught to prize, the fame that endeared and hallowed him to her eyes, the excitement of ambition, and its rewards. He spoke with such bitter disdain of great names and great deeds. "Children of a larger growth they were," said he, one day, in answer to her defence of the luminaries of their kind, "allured by baubles as poor as the rattle and the doll's house. How many have been made great, as the word is, by their vices! Paltry craft won command to Themistocles; to escape his duns, the profligate Caesar heads an army, and achieves his laurels; Brutus, the aristocrat, stabs his patron, that patricians might again trample on plebeians, and that posterity might talk of *him*. The love of posthumous fame—what is it but as puerile a passion for notoriety as that which made a Frenchman I once knew lay out two thousand pounds in sugar-plums? To be talked of—how poor a desire! Does it matter whether it be by the gossips of this age or the next? Some men are urged on to fame by poverty—that is an excuse for their trouble; but there is no more nobleness in the motive than in that which makes yon poor ploughman sweat in the eye of Phoebus. In fact, the larger part of eminent men, instead of being inspired by any lofty desire to benefit their species or enrich the human mind, have acted or composed, without any definite object beyond the satisfying a restless appetite for excitement, or indulging the dreams of a selfish glory. And when nobler aspirations have fired them, it has too often been but to wild fanaticism and sanguinary crime. What dupes of glory ever were animated by a deeper faith, a higher ambition, than the frantic followers of Mahomet,—taught to believe that it was virtue to ravage the earth, and that they sprang from the battle-field into paradise? Religion and liberty, love of country, what splendid motives to action! Lo, the results, when the motives are keen, the action once commenced! Behold the Inquisition, the Days of Terror, the Council of Ten, and the Dungeons of Venice!"

Evelyn was scarcely fit to wrestle with these melancholy fallacies; but her instinct of truth suggested an answer.

"What would society be if all men thought as you do, and acted up to the theory? No literature, no art, no glory, no patriotism, no virtue, no civilization! You analyze men's motives—how can you be sure you judge rightly? Look to the results,—our benefit, our enlightenment! If the results be great, Ambition is a virtue, no matter what motive awakened it. Is it not so?"

Evelyn spoke blushingly and timidly. Maltravers, despite his own tenets, was delighted with her reply.

"You reason well," said he, with a smile. "But how are we sure that the results are such as you depict them? Civilization, enlightenment,—they are vague terms, hollow sounds. Never fear that the world will reason as I do. Action will never be stagnant while there are such things as gold and power. The vessel will move on—let the galley-slaves have it to themselves. What I have seen of life convinces me that progress is not always improvement. Civilization has evils unknown to the savage state; and *vice versa*. Men in all states seem to have much the same proportion of happiness. We judge others with eyes accustomed to dwell on our own circumstances. I have seen the slave, whom we commiserate, enjoy his holiday with a rapture unknown to the grave freeman. I have seen that slave made free, and enriched by the benevolence of his master; and he has been gay no more. The masses of men in all countries are much the same. If there are greater comforts in the hardy North, Providence bestows a fertile earth and a glorious heaven, and a mind susceptible to enjoyment as flowers to light, on the voluptuous indulgence of the Italian, or the contented apathy of the Hindoo. In the mighty organization of good and evil, what can we vain individuals effect? They who labour most, how doubtful is their reputation! Who shall say whether Voltaire or Napoleon, Cromwell or Caesar, Walpole or Pitt, has done most good or most evil? It is a question casuists may dispute on. Some of us think that poets have been the delight and the lights of men; another school of philosophy has treated them as the corrupters of the species,—panderers to the false glory of war, to the effeminacies of taste, to the pampering of the passions above the reason. Nay, even those who have effected inventions that change the face of the earth—the printing-press, gunpowder, the steam-engine,—men hailed as benefactors by the unthinking herd, or the would-be sages,—have introduced ills unknown before, adulterating and often counterbalancing the good. Each new improvement in machinery deprives hundreds of food. Civilization is the eternal sacrifice of one generation to the next. An awful sense of the impotence of human agencies has crushed down the sublime aspirations for mankind which I once indulged. For myself, I float on the great waters, without pilot or rudder, and trust passively to the winds, that are the breath of God."

This conversation left a deep impression upon Evelyn; it inspired her with a new interest in one in whom so many noble qualities lay dulled and torpid, by the indulgence of a self-sophistry, which, girl as she was, she felt wholly unworthy of his powers. And it was this error in Maltravers that, levelling his superiority, brought him nearer to her heart. Ah, if she could restore him to his race! It was a

dangerous desire, but it intoxicated and absorbed her.

Oh, how sweetly were those fair evenings spent,—the evenings of happy June! And then, as Maltravers suffered the children to tease him into talk about the wonders he had seen in the regions far away, how did the soft and social hues of his character unfold themselves! There is in all real genius so much latent playfulness of nature it almost seems as if genius never could grow old. The inscriptions that youth writes upon the tablets of an imaginative mind are, indeed, never wholly obliterated,—they are as an invisible writing, which gradually becomes clear in the light and warmth. Bring genius familiarly with the young, and it is as young as they are. Evelyn did not yet, therefore, observe the disparity of *years* between herself and Maltravers. But the disparity of knowledge and power served for the present to interdict to her that sweet feeling of equality in commune, without which love is rarely a very intense affection in women. It is not so with men. But by degrees she grew more and more familiar with her stern friend; and in that familiarity there was perilous fascination to Maltravers. She could laugh him at any moment out of his most moody reveries; contradict with a pretty wilfulness his most favourite dogmas; nay, even scold him, with bewitching gravity, if he was not always at the command of her wishes—or caprice. At this time it seemed certain that Maltravers would fall in love with Evelyn; but it rested on more doubtful probabilities whether Evelyn would fall in love with him.

CHAPTER VII.

CONTRAHE vela,
Et te littoribus cymba propinqua vehat.*—SENECA.

* "Furl your sails, and let the next boat carry you to the shore."

"HAS not Miss Cameron a beautiful countenance?" said Mr. Merton to Maltravers, as Evelyn, unconscious of the compliment, sat at a little distance, bending down her eyes to Sophy, who was weaving daisy-chains on a stool at her knee, and whom she was telling not to talk loud,—for Merton had been giving Maltravers some useful information respecting the management of his estate; and Evelyn was already interested in all that could interest her friend. She had one excellent thing in woman, had Evelyn Cameron: despite her sunny cheerfulness of temper she was *quiet*; and she had insensibly acquired, under the roof of her musing and silent mother, the habit of never disturbing others. What a blessed secret is that in the intercourse of domestic life!

"Has not Miss Cameron a beautiful countenance?"

Maltravers started at the question,—it was a literal translation of his own thought at that moment. He checked the enthusiasm that rose to his lip, and calmly re-echoed the word,—

"Beautiful indeed!"

"And so sweet-tempered and unaffected; she has been admirably brought up. I believe Lady Vargrave is a most exemplary woman. Miss Cameron will, indeed, be a treasure to her betrothed husband. He is to be envied."

"Her betrothed husband!" said Maltravers, turning very pale.

"Yes; Lord Vargrave. Did you not know that she was engaged to him from her childhood? It was the wish, nay, command, of the late lord, who bequeathed her his vast fortune, if not on that condition, at least on that understanding. Did you never hear of this before?"

While Mr. Merton spoke, a sudden recollection returned to Maltravers. He *had* heard Lumley himself refer to the engagement, but it had been in the sick chamber of Florence,—little heeded at the time, and swept from his mind by a thousand after-thoughts and scenes. Mr. Merton continued,—

"We expect Lord Vargrave down soon. He is an ardent lover, I conclude; but public life chains him so much to London. He made an admirable speech in the Lords last night; at least, our party appear to think so. They are to be married when Miss Cameron attains the age of eighteen."

Accustomed to endurance, and skilled in the proud art of concealing emotion, Maltravers betrayed to the eye of Mr. Merton no symptom of surprise or dismay at this intelligence. If the rector had conceived any previous suspicion that Maltravers was touched beyond mere admiration for beauty, the suspicion would have vanished as he heard his guest coldly reply,—

"I trust Lord Vargrave may deserve his happiness. But, to return to Mr. Justis; you corroborate my own opinion of that smooth-spoken gentleman."

The conversation flowed back to business. At last, Maltravers rose to depart.

"Will you not dine with us to-day?" said the hospitable rector.

"Many thanks,—no; I have much business to attend to at home for some days to come."

"Kiss Sophy, Mr. Ernest,—Sophy very good girl to-day. Let the pretty butterfly go, because Evy said it was cruel to put it in a card-box; kiss Sophy."

Maltravers took the child (whose heart he had completely won) in his arms, and kissed her tenderly; then advancing to Evelyn, he held out his hand, while his eyes were fixed upon her with an expression of deep and mournful interest, which she could not understand.

"God bless you, Miss Cameron," he said, and his lip quivered.

Days passed, and they saw no more of Maltravers. He excused himself on pretence, now of business, now of other engagements, from all the invitations of the rector. Mr. Merton unsuspectingly accepted the excuse; for he knew that Maltravers was necessarily much occupied.

His arrival had now spread throughout the country; and such of his equals as were still in B——-shire hastened to offer congratulations, and press hospitality. Perhaps it was the desire to make his excuses to Merton valid which prompted the master of Burleigh to yield to the other invitations that crowded on him. But this was not all,—Maltravers acquired in the neighbourhood the reputation of a man of business. Mr. Justis was abruptly dismissed; with the help of the bailiff Maltravers became his own steward. His parting address to this personage was characteristic of the mingled harshness and justice of Maltravers.

"Sir," said he, as they closed their accounts, "I discharge you because you are a rascal,—there can be no dispute about that; you have plundered your owner, yet you have ground his tenants, and neglected the poor. My villages are filled with paupers, my rent-roll is reduced a fourth; and yet, while some of my tenants appear to pay nominal rents (why, you best know),—others are screwed up higher than any man's in the country. You are a rogue, Mr. Justis,—your own account-books show it; and if I send them to a lawyer, you would have to refund a sum that I could apply very advantageously to the rectification of your blunders."

"I hope, sir," said the steward, conscience-stricken and appalled,—"I hope you will not ruin me; indeed, indeed, if I was called upon to refund, I should go to jail."

"Make yourself easy, sir. It is just that I should suffer as well as you. My neglect of my own duties tempted you to roguery. You were honest under the vigilant eye of Mr. Cleveland. Retire with your gains: if you are quite hardened, no punishment can touch you; if you are not, it is punishment enough to stand there gray-headed, with one foot in the grave, and hear yourself called a rogue, and know that you cannot defend yourself,—go!"

Maltravers next occupied himself in all the affairs that a mismanaged estate brought upon him. He got rid of some tenants, he made new arrangements with others; he called labour into requisition by a variety of improvements; he paid minute attention to the poor, not in the weakness of careless and indiscriminate charity, by which popularity is so cheaply purchased, and independence so easily degraded,—no, his main care was to stimulate industry and raise hope. The ambition and emulation that he so vainly denied in himself, he found his most useful levers in the humble labourers whose characters he had studied, whose condition he sought to make themselves desire to elevate. Unconsciously his whole practice began to refute his theories. The abuses of the old Poor Laws were rife in his neighbourhood; his quick penetration, and perhaps his imperious habits of decision, suggested to him many of the best provisions of the law now called into operation; but he was too wise to be the Philosopher Square of a system. He did not attempt too much; and he recognized one principle, which, as yet, the administrators of the new Poor-Laws have not sufficiently discovered. One main object of the new code was, by curbing public charity, to task the activity of individual benevolence. If the proprietor or the clergyman find under his own eye isolated instances of severity, oppression, or hardship in a general and salutary law, instead of railing against the law, he ought to attend to the individual instances; and private benevolence ought to keep the balance of the scales even, and be the makeweight wherever there is a just deficiency of national charity.* It was this which, in the modified and discreet regulations that he sought to establish on his estates, Maltravers especially and pointedly attended to. Age, infirmity, temporary distress, unmerited destitution, found him a steady, watchful, indefatigable friend. In these labours, commenced with extraordinary promptitude, and the energy of a single purpose and stern mind, Maltravers was necessarily brought into contact with the neighbouring magistrates and gentry. He was combating evils and advancing objects in which all were interested; and his vigorous sense, and his past parliamentary reputation,

joined with the respect which in provinces always attaches to ancient birth, won unexpected and general favour to his views. At the rectory they heard of him constantly, not only through occasional visitors, but through Mr. Merton, who was ever thrown in his way; but he continued to keep himself aloof from the house. Every one (Mr. Merton excepted) missed him,—even Caroline, whose able though worldly mind could appreciate his conversation; the children mourned for their playmate, who was so much more affable than their own stiff-neckclothed brothers; and Evelyn was at least more serious and thoughtful than she had ever been before, and the talk of others seemed to her wearisome, trite, and dull.

* The object of parochial reform is not that of economy alone; not merely to reduce poor-rates. The ratepayer ought to remember that the more he wrests from the grip of the sturdy mendicant, the more he ought to bestow on undeserved distress. Without the mitigations of private virtue, every law that benevolists could make would be harsh.

Was Maltravers happy in his new pursuits? His state of mind at that time it is not easy to read. His masculine spirit and haughty temper were wrestling hard against a feeling that had been fast ripening into passion; but at night, in his solitary and cheerless home, a vision, too exquisite to indulge, would force itself upon him, till he started from the revery, and said to his rebellious heart: "A few more years, and thou wilt be still. What in this brief life is a pang more or less? Better to have nothing to care for, so wilt thou defraud Fate, thy deceitful foe! Be contented that thou art alone!" Fortunate was it, then, for Maltravers, that he was in his native land, not in climes where excitement is in the pursuit of pleasure rather than in the exercise of duties. In the hardy air of the liberal England, he was already, though unknown to himself, bracing and ennobling his dispositions and desires. It is the boast of this island that the slave whose foot touches the soil is free. The boast may be enlarged. Where so much is left to the people, where the life of civilization, not locked up in the tyranny of Central Despotism, spreads, vivifying, restless, ardent, through every vein of the healthful body, the most distant province, the obscurest village, has claims on our exertions, our duties, and forces us into energy and citizenship. The spirit of liberty, that strikes the chain from the slave, binds the freeman to his brother. This is the Religion of Freedom. And hence it is that the stormy struggles of free States have been blessed with results of Virtue, of Wisdom, and of Genius by Him who bade us love one another,—not only that love in itself is excellent, but that from love, which in its widest sense is but the spiritual term for liberty, whatever is worthiest of our solemn nature has its birth.

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